

The libretto in brief

Traduzione di Rodney Stringer

Act I

A rustic Alpine scene.

The inhabitants of a village are preparing to face the enemy army. Also with them is the marquise de Berkenfield, who has been forced by the hostilities to stop there on the way back to her castle. Very soon, however, the womens' prayers are interrupted by news that the war is over. The marquise fears that fighting might resume, and decides to wait before setting off. Preceded by Sulpice, the sergeant of the French regiment stationed in the village, a young woman now enters. She is Marie, the regiment's vivandière. The girl has been brought up under spartan conditions by the sergeant himself and by his fellow-soldiers, to whom she was entrusted by her father, a valiant officer, as he lay dying. Marie is loved by Tonio, a Tyrolese peasant who saved her life and would now like to declare his love. But he is caught by the soldiers outside the village, and mistaken for a spy. Only Marie's intervention saves him from being shot. Left alone with Marie, Tonio joyfully realizes that his love is required. Meanwhile, from Sulpice's words the marquise has discovered that the regiment's vivandière is none other than her own sister's daughter, who had long been believed missing. The noblewoman therefore decides to take her niece with her to her castle. Tonio, who enlisted with the regiment because he loves the girl, implores the marquise not to take her away. But Marie has to leave, much to the sadness of all and to Tonio's despair.

Act II

A hall in the marquise's castle.

Everything has been arranged for Marie's marriage to the duke of Crakentorp. The girl is given lessons in dancing, singing and good manners to make her presentable as a young lady in society. But the results are not encouraging, and Marie seems not to regret her past as a vivandière. On the contrary, she misses the joys of army life with Sulpice and her soldier friend. One day the regiment marches in, followed by Tonio. But the marquise, having by now found a noble match for her niece, resolutely bars his way. Furthermore, she reveals to Sulpice that she is not Marie's aunt but her mother, and that the girl was born out of wedlock. For this reason the marquise is anxious to get her daughter married into the legitimate name and estate of the Berkenfields. The sergeant convinces Marie not to act against her mother's wishes. But as the guests gather to witness the signing of the marriage contract, the soldiers of the regiment burst in, led by Tonio. They have come to the aid of their beloved daughter. To everyone's amazement, Marie tells the story of her happy childhood. Deeply moved, the marquise proclaims Tonio and Marie man and wife.